



Návrhy reforiem a investícií a ich implementácia v členských štátoch – aký je pohľad organizovanej občianskej spoločnosti?

11. januára 2024 od 10.00 do 12.00 hod.

Zastúpenie Európskej únie v Bratislave, Palisády 29, 811 06 Bratislava, Slovensko

Organiser of this round table

- European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

Description

This round table forms part of the consultation carried out by the EESC's European Semester Group (ESG) in connection with the preparation of the own-initiative opinion on 'Reform and investment proposals and their implementation in the Member States – what is the opinion of organised civil society? (2023-2024 European Semester cycle)'. ([ECO/631](#)).

The EESC's European Semester Group is continuing to consult national economic and social committees, social partners and civil society organisations from EU Member States.

This opinion focuses on the reform and investment measures in the Member States, in particular those based on the [country-specific recommendations 2023](#), and their implementation in order to assess the effectiveness of these measures and the possibilities for better targeting of proposals, improved implementation and the monitoring and involvement of organised civil society in the procedures. This opinion also looks at issues concerning the [ongoing reform of the EU's economic governance rules](#), the central objective of which is to strengthen public debt sustainability while promoting sustainable and inclusive growth in all Member States through reforms and investment. Moreover, the opinion continues the previous consultation exercises by examining the state of the implementation of the reforms and investments provided for in the national recovery and resilience plans, which are financially supported by the [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) funds. Finally, through this opinion, the EESC aims to continue its work to promote a participatory European Semester and economic governance framework, with greater ownership at national level and closer involvement of organised civil society.

The results of this consultation will be summarised in the EESC opinion, which is also appended hereto, in which the Committee continues to support a more participatory framework for the European Semester and economic governance with greater national ownership and greater involvement of organised civil society.

This round table will address the following issues (taken from the questionnaire on which this consultation is based):

- *The reform and investment measures in the Member States, in particular those based on the country-specific recommendations 2023, and their implementation.*
- *The reform of the EU's economic governance rules.*
- *The implementation of the reforms and investments provided for in the national recovery and resilience plans.*

- **The reform and investment measures in the Member States, in particular those based on the country-specific recommendations 2023, and their implementation**

The participants

- appreciated the fact that a debate was being held on the European Semester, which was the most important EU economic governance instrument;
- noted, at the same time, that there was insufficient awareness of the European Semester in the public space and that therefore there was also little involvement of civil society and the general public in the debate on the subject;
- the representatives of the social partners explained that the European Semester was not a topic that they particularly focused on, although its recommendations were crucial for a functioning economy;
- in view of the expected 2% GDP growth, it was stated that such relatively low growth would not contribute to real convergence relative to the other EU Member States, let alone catching up;
- noted that, in addition to the significant brain drain, Slovakia was facing the further problem of a shortage of manual workers;
- representatives of the scientific community were critical of the fact that they had been insufficiently consulted on the topic of promoting science, which made subsequent implementation difficult;
- stressed that, thanks to EU membership, initiatives were being launched in Slovakia that might not be supported internally;
- explained that in the area of lifelong learning, Slovakia was lagging behind despite many opportunities to move forward;
- by contrast, they pointed to measures and initiatives in the field of plastics disposal;
- stated that while the Recovery Plan ended in two years, i.e. in 2026, the European Semester was a long-term measure and that it was therefore necessary to focus on civil society engagement in its implementation;
- referring to the recommendation on integrating marginalised groups, and in particular the Roma, they mentioned the need to roll out across the board the projects that had proven to be successful in addressing this issue and not to implement them on a small scale;

- **The reform of the EU's economic governance rules**

The participants

- stated that the capacity for technical social and civic dialogue was insufficient and that involving society in the processes was complicated;
- agreed that the EU's competitiveness was crucial and needed to be supported by improving productivity and the quality of education and skills;

- in this regard, mentioned the declining quality of education in Slovakia, as demonstrated by the recent PISA survey, and highlighted this as one of the key shortcomings in improving the country's competitiveness;
- noted that civil society was not systematically called on to discuss economic governance and that, where it was called on to do so, its comments were not taken into account;
- **The implementation of the reforms and investments provided for in the national recovery and resilience plans**

The participants

- pointed out that as regards requests for payment out of the Recovery and Resilience Plan – under which a total of EUR 4.6 billion was earmarked for Slovakia – Slovakia was at the forefront. There had been three disbursements to Slovakia and the country had requested a fourth;
 - noted that there was a difficult period ahead in connection with the implementation of the investments and the completion of the recovery plan itself;
 - regretted that the recovery plan had not been subject to a consultation within the Tripartite Council, which might also result in some projects not being implemented, such as the hospital in Bratislava;
 - pointed out, at the same time, that the recovery plan's programming period was short, which also implied reduced scope for consultation with civil society;
 - stated that one obstacle was the current government's often hostile attitude towards civil society, and said that there was little willingness to include it in consultations;
 - said that it was and would be all the more important to include civil society in the implementation process, as civil society simply must participate in the recovery of society;
 - mentioned investment debt in education, health, and science and research;
 - assessed that the priorities were relevant in general, but expressed reservations about the proposed energy mix, which recommended the use of wind energy, for which there was almost no infrastructure in Slovakia; it was not geared towards the development of underutilised sustainable resources such as geothermal energy;
 - added that the energy mix in Slovakia was based on using nuclear power to generate electricity and on using gas for domestic heating and use in industry. As electricity was an important element of the green transition, the use of nuclear energy was beneficial. However, Slovakia was required to reduce its gas consumption, and the transition to new sources of energy was both time-consuming and costly. There was also a need for the public to be sufficiently informed of the specific objectives of such changes;
 - stressed, in the context of the ongoing green and digital transitions, which were having a significant impact on the labour market, that this needed to be linked to lifelong learning;
 - pointed out that the planned activities were jeopardised by a failure to specify the reasons for not solving problems and often a failure to evaluate problems in the implementation of measures, support, etc.
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